Kneading the body and soul in the Alps

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KNEADING THE BODY & SOUL IN THE ALPS

Staying above a bakery and near the spa is the height of indulgence

MIKE GRENBY
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD
PONTRESINA, SWITZERLAND

Before I left home, I told friends I had booked a hotel room in Switzerland near a bakery so I could wake up to the smell of fresh baking. The friends immediately offered to help me carry my suitcases. Well, my oven is indeed over the Hotel Alpina's bakery. And I do indeed wake up to the smell of fresh baking... at 2 a.m.

“Our bakery staff have to come in early because we supply the other hotels in town as well as our own hotel and bakery shop with close to 2,000 loaves of 45 different types of bread every day,” said Claudio Bochi, pastry chef whose wife, his sister Stephanie, is now the fourth generation of the family to run this hotel.

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Photos: Mike Grenby, for the Calgary Herald.
Clockwise: Mountain scene in Splugen; bread and pastry counter at Hotel Alpina; outdoor dining in Pontresina.
ALPS: Picture postcard scenery

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The pastry section also makes 25¢ square, like many others, provides guests who stay at least two nights with a pass good for free travel on many alpine railways, chairlifts and gondolas as well as some public transportation — definitely a good deal as a single trip to a mountain peak can cost as much as $100.

The Swiss take their walking, biking, climbing and mountain biking very seriously, with thousands of kilometers of trails in even the most rugged terrain. Perhaps, they need to balance not only the chocolate and pastries, but their other interests as well. For example, Dina Restaurant in Zozu features Engadin specialties and offers a tempting — and tasty — selection of items like hau soup, capuns (dumplings wrapped in dark leafy green chard), pinolato (buckwheat porridge) and fava beans (baked potato hash browns with ham and bacon).

Another culinary highlight is the nine-hour Rhätische Railway Kulinarik gourmet train trip. It has three round-trip routes and I chose the one starting in St. Moritz. First stop was Alp Grum, with its spectacular views near the 2,361-meter Bernina Pass and accessible by train or foot, where you can choose a soup or salad as your first lunch course.

An hour later, you board a train for the trip down into part of Switzerland's Italian section and a main course in Poschiavo. Two hours later, you take the short ride to dinner by the lake in Missago, near Tirano and the Swiss-Italian border. Then board a train for the two-hour trip back to St. Moritz. Cost: $30 to $50 depending on whether you choose to ride in a second-class or first-class carriage and whether you have one of the Swiss travel passes.

The Rhätische mountain railway in the Albula/Bernina Landscapes was added to the UNESCO World Heritage list last year, with its distinctive red carriages, it climbs from picturesque valley floors to 2,000-meter mountain passes.